

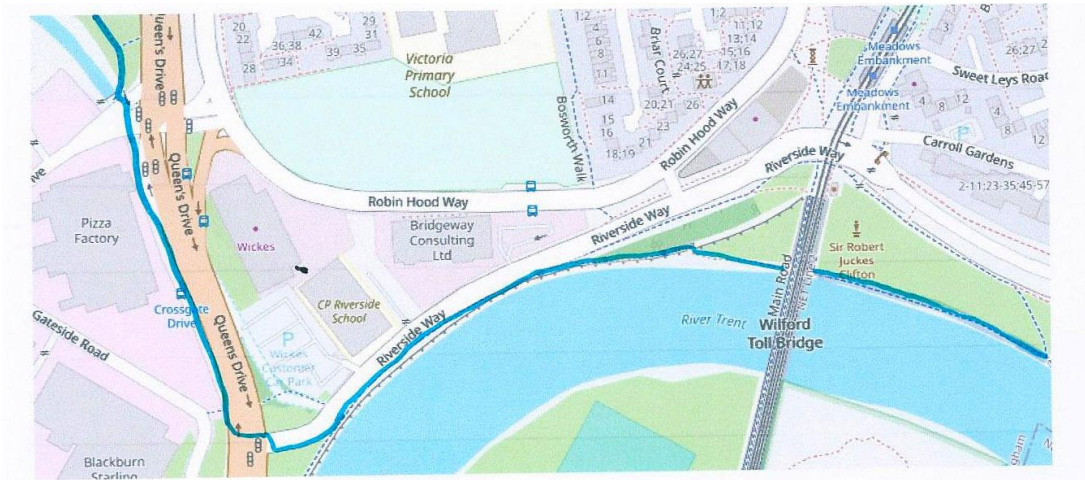
Walk No 18: R Trent, R Leen & Beeston-Nottingham Canal

This walk is about 11.5km and follows three waterways. It goes northwest alongside the River Trent beside Victoria Embankment and then alongside the River Leen to the edge of Lenton and then goes east alongside the Beeston to Nottingham Canal, past Nottingham station and then south back to the River Trent and over Trent Bridge. There are brief notes at the end (numbered) about some of the places along the route.



Go down Musters Road, left at Melton Road and cross over Loughborough Road into Welbeck Road and over the River Trent across the Wilford Suspension Bridge (described in Walk No 3). Go left alongside the river and under Wilford Toll Bridge and then up the steps to Riverside Way and along towards Queens Drive. On the river wall, just before Queens Drive, there is a sign indicating the River Leen Outfall – where the River Leen (1) goes from an underground channel out into the River Trent. Cross Queens Drive at the traffic signals

and go right, alongside Queen's Drive to the north side of Crossgate Drive. Here the River Leen emerges, in a deep channel behind the fence on the left. Take the path (Birdcage Walk) that bends to the left, north of Crossgate Drive, with the River Leen on your left and the NG2 Business Park on your right.



Continue along Birdcage Walk (2) and then bear left, alongside the River Leen, passing King's Meadow (3) on your right and then turn right on Lenton Lane.



Cross over the railway and then the NET tram route (4)



and continue along Lenton Lane and, with the Games Workshop - Warhammer World (5) on the left and Trent Vineyard Church (6) on the right, turn left into Willow Road.



Where Willow Road crosses the River Leen, turn right along a path beside the river. When the path reaches the Nottingham Canal (7) the river actually goes under the canal.

Turn right along the canal towpath, past Trevethick's boat yard (8) on the opposite bank.

Continue along the towpath, under Lenton Lane and then under a railway bridge carrying the Robin Hood Line (9), past the Castle Marina (10), the Castle Marina Retail Park and then the Castle Meadow site which was HM Revenue & Customs and now is The University of Nottingham Castle Meadow Campus (11).

On the north side of the canal are a number of modern apartments, with Nottingham Castle behind...

...but also some older buildings from the time when the canal was a busy route for trade and industry – this is the location of the Duke of Newcastle's Wharf (12), again with Nottingham Castle behind.



Continue along the canal path, under the Wilford Street bridge, and then up the sloping path opposite Castle Wharf (13).



Continue beside the canal, under Carrington Street bridge, then under the old Great Central Railway bridge (now carrying the NET tram route) and Trent Street bridge, then under London Road bridge where the canal turns sharply right (south) with the new Binks Yard restaurant opposite **(14)**.



The canal path goes up to and over the bridge and back down the other side. When on the bridge, on the eastern side is the old Great Northern Railway Station **(15)**.



Continue along the towpath and on the left is a superb piece of urban art **(16)**



Continue by the canal, under the 1886 Cattle Market Road bridge and the even older (late 1700s?) Meadow Lane bridge (now a footbridge, the new alignment of Meadow Lane being the next bridge) and along to the Meadow Lane lock and then alongside the Trent to Trent Bridge and back up Musters Road and the end of this walk.

Notes for Walk No 18: R Trent, R Leen & Beeston-Nottingham Canal

1. River Leen

At the start of Birdcage Walk where it meets the junction of Crossgate Drive and Queens Drive, the River Leen is in a deep channel. At this point it goes under Queens Drive and into the River Trent.



It stays in a man-made channel alongside Birdcage Walk.



Wikipedia provides a good history of the River Leen - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Leen - The name Leen comes from the Celtic word meaning "lake" or "pool" and the river gave its name to Lenton, 'ton' being the Saxon word for village. The 15 mile route of the River Leen starts as a series of springs at the foot of the Robin Hood Hills just outside Annesley and joins the Trent next to Riverside Way. Its route through Nottingham has changed over the centuries, as described by Wikipedia:

From Lenton onwards the course of the Leen has been quite radically altered on a number of occasions, although the river's present course probably follows a route close to its original natural course. The first change to the river's course came in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, when the river was diverted to pass beneath the cliff on which Nottingham Castle was situated before flowing into the Trent near Trent Bridge, thus providing the town of Nottingham with a more plentiful supply of water. This alignment near the Castle is shown in this drawing by Thomas Hammond.



Nottingham Castle before restoration, showing the River Leen, 1870

The next change came with the opening of the Nottingham Canal which in some places occupied the course of the Leen, with the river being diverted along the route of the present Canal Street (this stretch was soon culverted by the Nottingham Borough Engineer).

Further changes came with the construction of Castle Boulevard along the foot of the Castle cliff in 1884. With insufficient room for river, canal and road, the river was diverted into the canal at Lenton and the road built on the course of the former river. After flowing some distance along the canal, the river passed over a small weir into the Tinker's Leen (where the modern Courts complex is now situated) and so into the Trent just downstream of Trent Bridge. However over time, and as the river's catchment area became more built up with faster run-off times, flooding became a problem, with particularly heavy flooding in 1960. By this stage, the main line of the canal between Lenton and Langley Mill had been abandoned, although the stretch through Nottingham remains in use as part of the Trent navigation.

This flooding led to a further diversion, which would largely divert the river back to its original pre-eleventh-century course.

The river was first diverted into the southernmost section of the abandoned canal, between Derby Road and the operational canal at Lenton. It was then taken under the operational canal in a syphon, before entering a brand new channel that took it to join the Trent near the Riverside Way/ Queens Drive junction.



The River Leen goes under the Nottingham Canal

2. Birdcage Walk

I have been unable to discover why this path is so named. Birdcage Walk is the name of a march composed in 1951 by Arnold Steck. It is also the name of a 2017 novel by Helen Dunmore, although here the "Birdcage Walk" in question is in Clifton, Bristol. The most famous Birdcage Walk runs along the southern side of St James Park in London. It's so named because King James I had a particular penchant for exotic birds, and kept many of them in cages and aviaries lining this street. Perhaps this is the link, as it was James I son, Charles I who came to Nottingham Castle in 1642 and raised his royal standard to demonstrate his authority.

3. King's Meadow

As noted in Walk No 9, The Meadows was originally land belonging to Nottingham Castle and known as the King's Meadow – now the name of this nature reserve which was created in 1992 as a receptor site for flora and fauna that would otherwise have been destroyed by development on the former Wilford Power Station.

When the power station was decommissioned in the 1960, a layer of pulverised fuel ash (PFA) was spread on the site. Nature being nature, the area became colonised by two species of orchid; common spotted and southern marsh, which then pollinated and produced hybrids. Other species typical of sparsely-vegetated, man-made sites also colonised creating a very unusual post-industrial grassland habitat of high conservation value.

When the power station land was earmarked for development the Nottingham Wildlife Trust headed a campaign to save the habitat and its flora. As a result, in 1995 large sections of vegetated ash turf were successfully moved from the power station site to the newly-created Kings' Meadow reserve.

4. NET bridge

I had retired from my role as Director NET soon after signing the contract for Phase 2 but it was good to watch the construction process, including, in February 2013, the bridge over the railway at Lenton Lane. The main structure was driven into position by four 40-wheel self-propelled modular transporters. They drove the bridge across the railway and lifted it up onto concrete supports either side of the tracks. To avoid disruption to main line trains the 28 hour operation was planned to coincide with scheduled Network Rail engineering works between Derby and Nottingham.



5. Games Workshop (Warhammer World)

Warhammer World is the home of the Warhammer miniature games, Games Workshop's global headquarters and visitor centre, a haven for collectors and gamers from across the globe!



6. Trent Vineyard Church

This welcoming church holds lively and progressive Christian services with live bands staged in contemporary surroundings.

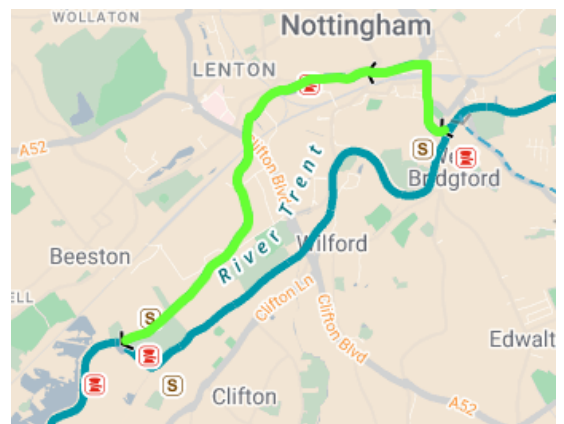


7. Nottingham & Beeston Canal

The Canal & River Trust website describes the canal as:

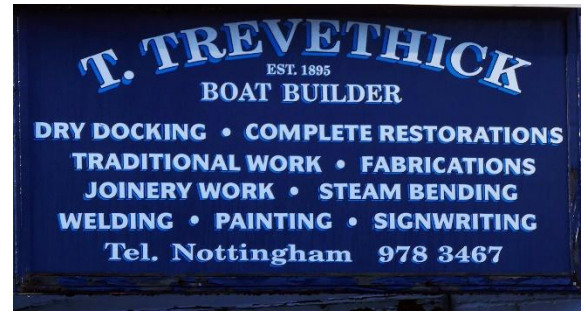
“once part of a much longer route, which is now derelict. The present-day stretch remains a vital link for boaters, allowing them to bypass an unnavigable section of the River Trent. The coalfields of Nottinghamshire brought great wealth to the region, but transport by the local roads was slow and expensive. As Canal Mania swept the country in the 1790s, the citizens of Nottingham resolved not to miss out, and planned a new waterway from the city to Langley Mill. There, it would connect with the Cromford Canal, which was already busy with coal traffic.

The canal opened in 1796, 15 miles long with 20 locks - most of which were grouped into a flight at Wollaton. The geography of the waterways in central Nottingham was, and is, complex. The city was built on the River Trent, but river navigation immediately upstream of the city had always been difficult. While the Nottingham Canal was being constructed, the Trent Navigation Company built an artificial canal - the Beeston Cut - to bypass the river from Trent Lock to Lenton. There, it met with the Nottingham Canal, which therefore became part of the river through-route. Two hundred years later, this is the only part of the Nottingham Canal to survive”.

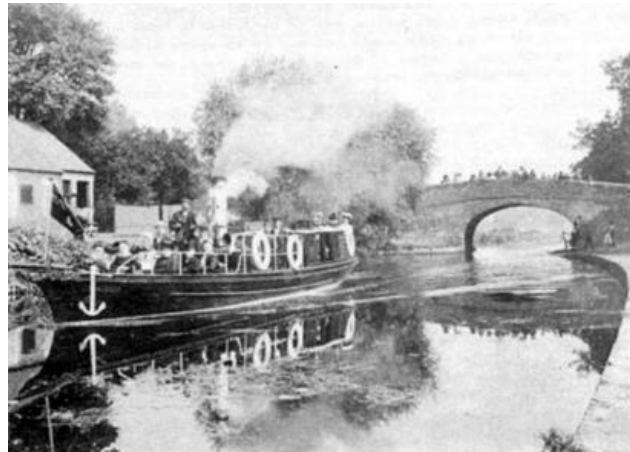


8. Trevethick's Boat Yard

Trevethick's boat yard, the oldest in Nottingham, first opened for business just as the canal was completed in 1796. The yard was bought by Thomas Trevethick in 1903 who had started his business in Gainsborough in 1895, but boat building was already a family tradition. Thomas's father had worked on sailing ship construction as a mast and block maker in the 18th century. Also, earlier in the Trevethick family tree is one Richard Trevethick, the Cornish engineer, pioneer builder of high-pressure steam engines and 'father of the locomotive'.



In addition to boat building and repair, the yard operated over two coal-fired pleasure steamers, making trips to Trent Lock and back, price one shilling and three pence. Also there were canoes and rowing boats for hire.



A Trevethick cruiser steams past the boatyard c.1908.
Photograph Courtesy of Tom Trevethick.

The boat hire business finished in the 1970s but the repair work continues at the yard.

Read more in 'The Lenton Listener' Issue 13, July-August 1981

https://www.lentontimes.co.uk/images/gallery/gregory_street/gregory_st_listener_13.htm



9. Robin Hood Line

The majority of the current Robin Hood Line re-uses the former Midland Railway (MR) route from Nottingham to Worksop. Following the Beeching cuts of the 1960s, the line became freight-only and a section north of Annesley was removed in order to save the costs of maintaining a tunnel. The line from Nottingham remained intact as far as Newstead, where it served the now closed Newstead Colliery.

The plans for the Robin Hood Line (RHL) were initiated by a small team at Nottinghamshire County Council. It was vital in the interest of keeping costs down to make as much use of the existing infrastructure as possible but the tunnel did have to be re-excavated; fortunately the original structure was in good condition. The new passenger service from Nottingham to Newstead opened in 1993, Bulwell station in 1994 and the extension to Mansfield Woodhouse in 1995, with Kirkby-in-Ashfield station opening in 1996. The through passenger route from Nottingham to Worksop opened in 1998.

In 2004, the development of the Nottingham Express Transit tramway required the section of RHL between Bulwell and Hucknall to be converted to single track with NET running alongside.

10. Castle Marina

Built in 1980s the Marina is, according to an on-line interview (www.leftlion.co.uk/read/2019/september/life-on-nottingham-canals) “home to a mix of semi-retired folk, young professionals looking to minimise housing costs and, with a wry smile, what Robin calls ‘single men’ [i.e. divorced].”



11. Castle Meadow Campus

Completed in September 1994 these distinctive buildings employ natural ventilation. The design employs the thermal mass of the concrete to cool the building at night. The main Amenity Building has a fabric roof suspended from four raking steel masts.



Until recently the site was occupied by HMRC (HM Revenue and Customs), now situated in the Unity Square building near Nottingham Station. The University of Nottingham acquired the site in late 2021 and have announced that:

Detailed plans for the new campus will be discussed with colleagues across our university community in a series of conversations across the year, although a number of likely core uses for the new campus have already been identified.

- A new city centre location for Nottingham University Business School - home to teaching, research and partnership activity, increasing postgraduate opportunities and our collaboration with strategic partners in the city and beyond
- A practice-based campus for final year and postgraduate students, which offers space to major employers to create an ecosystem of employers and students to work and learn together, ultimately preparing our students for life after university
- A home for Digital Nottingham, providing a civic, research and innovation hub, delivering lasting benefits for the city's residents, businesses and economy by developing skills, ambitions and opportunities for growth in a digital and data-driven world.

All of these ambitions can now be realised in an environmentally-sustainable way, more quickly and at a lower cost than was originally planned before the Castle Meadow site became available.

12. Duke of Newcastle's Wharf

As trade along the canal developed, sailmakers and timber merchants established waterside premises and lived in the Castle Boulevard area.

This painting 'Nottingham Castle', by Victorian artist Samuel Oscoft, shows a river barge unloading timber at what was the Duke of Newcastle's Wharf.

The 'Duke of Newcastle' was Henry Pelham-Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle who was Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire from 1809 to 1839.



After the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the present 'Ducal Mansion' (Nottingham Castle) was built by William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle and completed by his son, Henry Cavendish, 2nd Duke of Newcastle.

With the industrialisation of the town the mansion's attraction gradually diminished and by 1750 the Duke's visits had come to an end. Converting the building into apartments, the Duke rented them off to wealthy tenants. Later used as a boarding school, the mansion slowly declined and the gardens were let off as allotments.

The last residents quit the building in 1829 and it remained unoccupied. By this time great changes had come to Nottingham as part of the Industrial Revolution, which left Nottingham with the reputation of having the worst slums in the British Empire outside India. When residents of these slums rioted in 1831, in protest against the Duke of Newcastle's opposition to the Reform Act 1832 they burned down the mansion.

For many years the blackened and gutted shell was to look down over Nottingham until in the 1870s the Town Council resolved that the Castle and its grounds would be an ideal site for a Museum of Fine Art which was opened in 1878.

13. Castle Wharf

This area has obviously changed considerably since the age of the canal although some of the buildings remain. Barge transport declined due to competition from rail and road. When Britain's transport network – canals, buses, railways and road haulage companies – was nationalised the canals were managed by British Waterways until the creation of the Canal & River Trust in 2012 to own and maintain the canal network as a charity. There is an information board beside the canal which reminds us that used to be a very busy site with dozens of boats, horses and labourers going about the business of bulk transport.

The largest fleet of barges and narrowboats in the country were operated by Fellows, Morton & Clayton – the company depot building from 1895 is now a pub/restaurant.

Looking to the right you see the Carrington Street bridge – a newer structure than the one shown in this drawing by Thomas William Hammond, 1854-1935.

(More of Hammond's drawings of Nottingham can be found on the <https://picturenottingham.co.uk/> website.)



Hammond was born in Philadelphia of Nottingham emigres and, orphaned at the age of four, he came to Nottingham with his younger sister Maria. In 1868 age 14 he enrolled in the Government School of Design (the local establishment is now part of Nottingham Trent University). On the 1871 census he is described as a lace curtain designer, and in 1872 he was awarded the 'Queen's Prize for a Design of a Lace Curtain'. Other prizes followed and he soon began to use his skills as a draftsman to record aspects of the changing town. His real hobby was black and white sketching in charcoal. He drew about 350 pictures all together, mainly scenes of Nottingham.

On a wall (on the right in the above drawing) is a new plaque erected by the Nottingham Civic Society which commemorates an 1818 explosion which destroyed buildings on the opposite bank of the canal, killing ten people.

According to a Nottinghamshire History article

<http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/articles/canalexpllosion.htm> a barge was unloading 21 barrels of gunpowder destined for the coal mines when some powder spilled out on the wharf.



One of the crew, Joseph Musson, seeing that gunpowder had been spilt, went to get a hot coal from another boat. "You've got a fire in your boat, I want a live coke," he said, "Lads, I'm going to have a flash." Musson carried the hot coal back gripped by two sticks, but he dropped it; he then picked it up and juggled it between his hands, until he dropped it on the wharf where the powder had been spilled. "In a moment the whole exploded and precipitated himself and nine others into an eternal world." The trail of spilt powder had set alight in an instant, and exploded all 21 barrels.

It was a spectacular end for Musson himself, who was blasted 126 yards into the Meadows. "The unfortunate author of the mischief was thrown a great distance into the Meadows, where his remains were found, rent asunder and scattered in several parts."

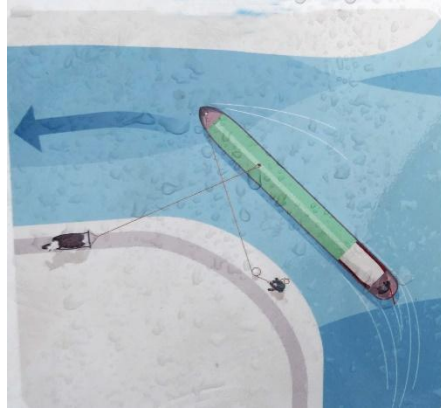
Looking to the left fronting the Canal is the 6 storey Grade II Listed British Waterways Building, formerly known as the Trent Navigation Company warehouse. It was originally built in around 1919 for the storage and loading of goods and materials onto canal barges for transportation across the country. More recently, the building was converted for leisure use as part of the 1996 Castle Wharf development (behind the British Waterways building). A gym and the Wetherspoon pub The Company Inn were based within the building but have both closed. The Glee Comedy Club remains.



Planning permission was given in September 2022 to convert the landmark building into 95 apartments.

14. Canal Bend and the Binks Yard restaurant

At this sharp bend in the canal you will notice a short wooden post on the towpath – the purpose of this is explained in the nearby information board



A canal barge loaded with 30 tons of cargo is not an easy vehicle to steer around a sharp corner like the one found here. In the days of horse towing, there was a danger that as the horse turned, the barge would only be able to make a very wide slow arc around the bend, causing congestion, or even colliding with other boats.

The wooden post on the towpath by the bend is a 'strapping post' to help solve this problem. The barge skipper throws a rope as he goes past which his assistant wraps around the post. The boat turns around the post like the hands of a clock until the rope is cast loose again.

On the opposite bank is the new Cleaver & Wake Binks Yard restaurant.

Named after Henry Binks, a Victorian beer retailer who worked around the original Island site, this is the first development of the Island Quarter masterplan, which received outline planning approval in April 2019, and will include hotels and hospitality, office space and community living and green spaces.



15. Nottingham London Road railway station

The station was opened in 1857 by the Great Northern Railway (GNR) at the terminus of its line from Grantham. The station was designed by the local architect Thomas Chambers Hine.

The last passenger service to this station ran on 22 May 1944. The station remained open as a mail depot for troops during the Second World War before becoming a parcels depot until the 1970s. Although severely damaged by fire in 1996, the station building has been restored and was converted to a Holmes Place health and fitness club. It is now used as a Virgin Active Health Club.



16. Canalside Street Art



During 2022 this street art was created on the wall alongside the canal towpath, also visible from London Road. The work was commissioned by the Canal & River Trust as part of the Nottingham Canal Improvement Partnership and was painted by Boaster Yard, local street artists.

At the Nottingham end the painting shows a series of pipes, valves and taps with the name Thomas Hawksley.



Hawksley (1807-1893) was the son of a worsted manufacturer in Arnold. He was educated at Nottingham Grammar School and then apprenticed to a firm of architects and engineer, in which he soon became a partner.

In 1830, when he was only 23, Hawksley undertook the construction for the Trent Waterworks Company of a new pumping station on what is now Victoria Embankment close to Trent Bridge (demolished in the early 20th century). Water was obtained from the River Trent by filtration through natural beds of sand and gravel and pumped by a cylinder steam engine through a 15 inch main to a reservoir on Park Row. In 1832 Hawksley personally turned on the tap which supplied water under pressure twenty four hours a day to the streets, courts and alleyways, so that at any hour the housewives of Nottingham could fill their pails at the tap in the yard.



The main part of the painting shows the canal with cartoon figures of animals and boats – here are three of them.



At the Trent end is a quotation which comes from *An itinerary of Nottingham: London Road*, by J. Holland Walker in the *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*

Nottinghamshire History website:
<http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/articles/tts/tts1925/itinerary1925p3.htm>



Writing nearly 100 years ago, Walker says:

*“It is difficult to realise as one walks down the modern London Road with its wilderness of brick and mortar that less than two hundred years it was one of the favourite promenades of the good folk of Nottingham. And even more difficult is it to understand that it was an ipse dixit [a dogmatic and unproven statement] amongst travellers by stage coaches that **the mile that separated Trent Bridge from Nottingham was the most beautiful mile near any town in Great Britain.** But it must have been beautiful. The road crossed a lovely open space, the common lands of the town which in spring were carpeted with the ethereal blue of the crocus that we have now destroyed”.*



Nottingham from London Road, c.1808.

The ancient name of London Road was the Flood Road as it carried travellers over the flood plain of the Trent. Walker describes London Road as having ‘commonable’ land or ‘croft’ i.e. land allowed to be jointly used or owned, a right of pasturage held in common, on both sides – West Croft on west (the Meadows) side and on the eastern side was the canal and then East Croft – hence the name of the City Council’s Eastcroft depot and the Eastcroft Incinerator.

Walker gives some history of the building of the canal: *“The bill for its construction received the Royal Assent in 1783, but that was a period of great financial stringency and nothing was done until 1792 when the first sod was cut. When a start was made, work proceeded apace, and by the following year, 1793, the first section of the canal was ready for opening. The opening of this canal was an occasion of much ceremony, a procession of three decorated barges was formed, each barge being loaded with stone. In the first barge was placed the engineer of the work and he was accompanied by the regimental band of the Light Horse then in garrison at the Park Barracks. As the first lock was filled these heroes played "Rule Britannia" and during the voyage to the town they played "Hearts of Oak," "God Save the King," and other similar patriotic but singularly inappropriate nautical pieces”.*